



Building a National Picture of The Abuse of Older People: The Implications of Data Collections.



Policy Brief

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Key Issues

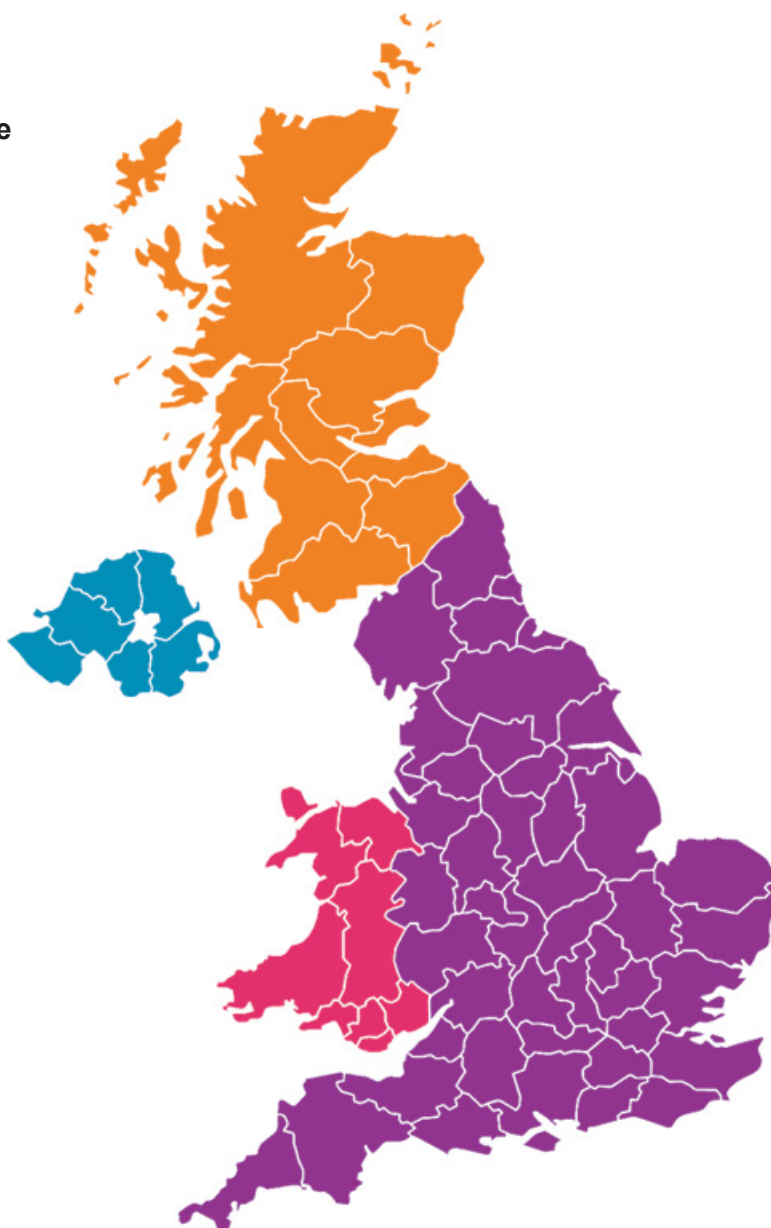
There is an absence of regular, comprehensive data on violence and abuse of older people in the UK.

The response to abuse in older age sits between the domestic abuse response, hate crime monitoring and adult safeguarding, creating a diffuse and conflicting data landscape.

The four jurisdictions of the UK have varied practice in recording data on crimes against older people.

The only national prevalence study on the abuse of older people in the UK (2007), which found evidence of huge complexity in the manifestations of abuse in later life, still has relevance for data collection today.

There is little research on the perpetrators of abuse of older people, restricting evidenced based policy making.



Recommendations:

The Government should co-ordinate an investigation into the abuse of older people working between the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and Department of Health and Social Care to bring together knowledge on domestic abuse, crimes against older people and adult protection.

A specialised investigation is required to respond to the complexity of experiences of abuse in later life. The abuse of older people sits in the cross hairs of domestic abuse (newly defined in the Domestic Abuse Act as occurring between ‘personally connected’ partners, ex-partners, and family members); criminal justice, in particular hate crime monitoring; and adult protection. These intersections have worked to hide older people as a group suffering significant and complex manifestations of abuse. The 2007 national prevalence study proved to be a false start in putting the abuse of older people on the national policy agenda. This review provided a snapshot of the landscape and was equally subject to limitations – for example the survey did not include those older people living in care home settings.

The Government’s upcoming Perpetrator Strategy should prioritise data collection to better understand perpetrators of abuse of older people.

Under the remit of the Domestic Abuse Act, the Government has committed to a greater focus on the perpetrators of domestic abuse. The perpetrator strategy should include a targeted consideration of perpetrators of abuse against older people as well as older perpetrators of abuse. This responds to the increased diversity of perpetrator types seen in instances of abuse in later life. This measure will ensure that the perpetrator strategy does not develop programmes and services that marginalise older people.

In all UK jurisdictions the police and prosecution services should adopt a standard policy for flagging ‘crimes against older people’.

Some progress has been made in recording and sharing information between the police and prosecution services but there remain significant gaps. The policy in place under the CPS should be adopted by all UK police forces and prosecution services. The CPS (England and Wales) have developed a category that is not purely based on the age of the victim. It additionally considers the circumstances of the crime. In particular the policy states consideration of where there is an existing relationship and expectation of trust; where the perpetrator has perceived vulnerability of the older victim; where there appears to be hostility based on age. In Scotland, ‘age’ is now a protected characteristic under hate crime law, but data practice should adopt the three-part definition, considering the expectation of trust and perceived vulnerability as well as evident hostility based on age. In Northern Ireland the PSNI and PPS should also adopt the category of ‘crimes against older people’, which would allow for analysis of the prevalence of such cases in the justice system.

Policy background:

We know older people face significant risks of harm and abuse perpetrated by those in a position of trust. The abuse of older people requires specialised policy responses as older people are unique from the general population of victims of interpersonal abuse. There are different demographic and relationship characteristics associated with victims and perpetrators. However, there is an absence of convincing data to depict the experience of abuse in later life in the UK. This poses a problem to developing effective evidence-based policies and to monitoring progress on the issue.

In the UK and internationally, older people are excluded from datasets. The UN's Economic and Social Research Council identified how data systems leave older people behind. In general terms, age-caps in data gathering and the lack of disaggregation between older groups are key problems. On the latter the report recommended 'that research and statistical data on ageing can be disaggregated into smaller five-year cohorts'.¹ On data concerning violence and abuse, the report identified a global scarcity and highlighted that where countries are supported in measuring gender-based violence,² no such data collection guidelines exist for monitoring violence and abuse in later life.

For national data on the abuse of older people in the UK we might look to three sources: the Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW); police reports; and administrative data on adults who come into contact with adult protection services. There are significant limitations on these sources.

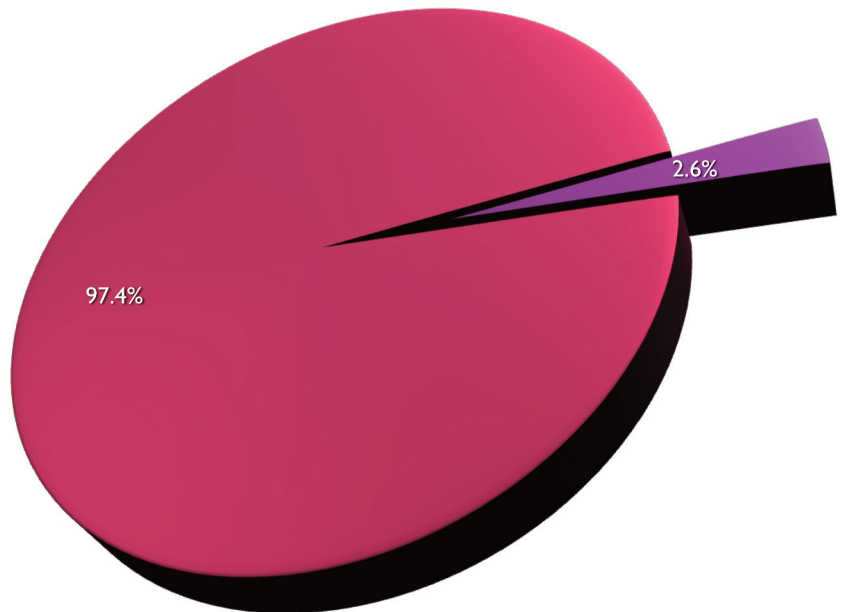
Historically the CSEW has had an upper limit of 59 years of age on the intimate violence module. This was raised to 74 in 2017 and it was recently announced that from 2022 the national data collection on domestic abuse will, for the first time, include the 75s and over. However, the lack of historic data poses an ongoing problem in better understanding crimes and abuse perpetrated against older people.

Police forces in England, Wales and Scotland do not routinely record the age of complainants in police statistics.³ Northern Ireland can be cited as an example of best practice in this regard, appearing to be unique in police forces routinely including information on the alleged victim. By comparison, the Crown Prosecution Service (England and Wales) and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (Scotland) have put in place policy for 'flagging' crimes against older people. This policy positions crimes against older people under the umbrella of hate crime.

Adult protection, as an administrative process that disproportionately comes into contact with older people, could be a useful source of data on the abuse of older people. As a devolved matter, practice varies across the UK. England and Wales have annual national datasets on those coming into contact with adult protection. In Wales, types of abuse are disaggregated by age, grouping those 'aged 65 and over'.⁴ In England's Safeguarding Adults Collection, monitoring has a higher degree of detail, reporting on individuals involved in Section 42 safeguarding enquiries by age groups: 18-64; 65-74; 75-84; and 85+.⁵ The datasets look at different aspects of adult protection in regard to age and are therefore not comparable. The England collection is limited in that it does not disaggregate types of abuse by age. This dataset therefore provides an insight on levels of enquiries but not the nature of these enquiries.

Additionally, we can look to the findings of the only national prevalence survey, the findings of which are still relevant today. In 2007, Hourglass (then Action on Elder Abuse) supported the Kings College London and National Centre for Social Research prevalence study. The study found that 2.6% of people aged 66 and over had experienced abuse in the last year.^{6 7} As well as a prevalence estimate, the lessons learned from the study depicted the complexity of experiences of abuse in older age.

The study found that 2.6% of people ages 66 and over had experienced abuse in the last year.⁶



The study looked at each type of abuse and the difference in risk factors associated with each type. Each form of abuse was found to have a distinctive set of factors associated with it, with relatively little overlap between types of abuse. Similarly, the study found that types of perpetrator did not cluster around victims with particular characteristics.⁸ It also found convincing evidence that abuse of older people is not limited to an inner circle of family, friends, and professional carers but implicates an 'outer circle' of neighbours and acquaintances too.⁹

These findings have ongoing relevance. Analysis of calls to the Hourglass helpline identifies that experiences of harm are complex and varied. The policy implications of this apparent complexity in the manifestations of abuse in later life are not vastly changed from 2007. We know that policy responses need to avoid blanket terminology surrounding abuse in later life to reflect the wide variety of perpetrators and significant differences in types of abuse. It is not sufficient to homogenise older people into a 60+ or 65+ category. Rather, to accurately understand older people's experiences it needs to be common practice to disaggregate this group into five-year cohorts. Good data practice will come out of engaging with this complexity. Despite a major prevalence study, fourteen years later major gaps in data and understanding remain. Good data collection can create a narrative to inform policy and practice, and as such filling in the gaps regarding abuse of older people should be an urgent priority.

Recommendations:

The Government should co-ordinate an investigation into the abuse of older people working between the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and Department of Health and Social Care to bring together knowledge on domestic abuse, crimes against older people and adult protection.

A specialised investigation is required to respond to the complexity of experiences of abuse in later life. The abuse of older people sits in the cross hairs of domestic abuse (newly defined in the Domestic Abuse Act as occurring between ‘personally connected’ partners, ex-partners, and family members); criminal justice, in particular hate crime monitoring; and adult protection. These intersections have worked to hide older people as a group suffering significant and complex manifestations of abuse. The 2007 national prevalence study proved to be a false start in putting the abuse of older people on the national policy agenda. This review provided a snapshot of the landscape and was equally subject to limitations – for example the survey did not include those older people living in care home settings.

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Consulted or recommended resources

¹ ESRC, How Data Systems Leave Older People Behind, HelpAge International. (2017). Pg 3.

² Ibid. Pg 16.

³ Brown, Kevin J.; Gordon, Faith. Older victims of crime. International Review of Victimology, (2018). Pg 9.

Stats Wales, Types of alleged abuse by local authority, measure and age of alleged victim.

<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Adult-Services/Adult-Safeguarding/typesofabuse-by-localauthority-measure-age> [accessed: 29/04/21].

⁵ NHS Digital, Safeguarding Adult series. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/safeguarding-adults> [accessed: 29/04/21].

⁶ O'Keefe M. et al., The U.K. national study of abuse and neglect among older people (2007). London.

⁷ Note this is a one-year prevalence, our 2020 survey found the number of adults who had experienced abuse since turning 65 and so it not directly comparable.

⁸ Biggs, et al. Abuse and neglect of older people: Secondary analysis of UK prevalence study. (2013) Pg 68.

⁹ Ibid. pg 68.



Hourglass

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You can contact us in many ways:

24/7 Helpline: 0808 808 8141

Our helpline is entirely confidential and free to call from a landline or mobile, and the number will not appear on your phone bill.

Text message: 07860 052906

Texts from outside the UK will be charged at their standard international rate which will differ depending on location and service charges of your phone provider. The number will appear on your bill and in your phone records but will not be identified as Hourglass.

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